

**World Academy of Arts and Science
Roundtable on the Future of Democracy
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Participants of the roundtable expressed their grave concern at a number of recent trends that are weakening democracy in many countries and giving rise to populist movements in others. These trends accentuate a more longstanding crisis caused by the influence of wealthy donors and lobbyists and the resulting departure of politics from the pursuit of public interest. Popular disenchantment with the political establishment also reflects well-documented trends toward radical income and wealth inequality, as well as deteriorating social services and increasing precarity in labour markets, often in the name of budget repair or to boost global competitiveness. Meanwhile major contemporary sustainability challenges are not addressed with the required urgency, further undermining public trust.

The public will have trust only when they feel included in a collective political process that belongs to them, and in which they have a meaningful part to play. The fear, rivalry, mounting personal insecurities and abrogation of personal responsibility, generated by the current system, must give way to mutual trust and responsible decision-making.

To reverse the decline of democracy, we recommend stronger regulation of the economy and finance sector to combat rising inequality, as well as fiscal reforms to provide the means for adequate social services. These efforts need to be coordinated through international cooperation on issues such as company, wealth and inheritance taxes and tax havens, inhumane labour practices and production practices that externalise the cost of environmental destruction.

We also recommend a reform of legislation on political donations and revolving-door practices, as well as steps to safeguard the independence of mass media and discourage fake news and privacy violations for political purposes on social media platforms. Plural and diverse media are vital for providing information and opinion to the public, in support of democratic deliberative processes.

The moral and social purpose of democracy is to create and maintain a just, peaceful and sustainable society; a society that makes fair decisions in the public interest of present and future generations through transparent and open processes of consultation, deliberation and compromise, while safeguarding the basic rights of minorities and individual citizens. People are ends not means, and they and the planet they share with all other living species must be put before profit-seeking and mindless growth as ends in themselves.

Participative-representative democracy is the most rational form of government. A decline in democracy that leads to exclusion or the silencing of stakeholders' voices, impoverishes the debate, distorts its conclusions and undermines its legitimacy.

Elective representative democracy, wherein citizen participation is confined to voting in local or general elections at distant intervals for political parties, none of which may have programs that fully satisfy citizens, may need to give way to new and more "participative" forms of representative democracy, with ongoing involvement of citizens in the management of public affairs, and with a focus on individual policy issues rather than party-based programs and unenforceable election promises.

In countries where democracy has already been seriously damaged or not yet established, citizens must stand up for their rights, and other democratic countries should support their efforts without forceful intervention.